

PHOTOGRAPHY

FAQ

Q What can I attach to the threaded lens ring on my digital camera?

A The main use for the threaded ring is for lens filters. Polarising and neutral density filters are useful to control the quality and amount of light entering the lens. We would also recommend a protective filter. In the event of damage, you just replace the cheap protective filter.

The lens ring on a compact camera can also be used to take conversion lenses. Telephoto and wide-angle lenses cost around £100. For the best quality, it's best to get one designed for your camera. However, any conversion lens with the same sized thread as your camera can be used easily; other lenses with different sized threads can also be used, but you'll have to invest in a conversion ring as well.

Ben Pitt

Music and photography expert

ben@computershopper.co.uk



CASIO Exilim SX-Z70

★★★★

£140 inc VAT

A 7-megapixel camera for £140 isn't that unusual, but they're not usually as slender as the SX-Z70, which measures just 22mm from front to back. This instantly elevates the SX-Z70 to the status of desirable gadget, but it's also really handy for slipping into a small handbag or trouser pocket. It's available in black, silver or red, and the 2½in screen keeps up appearances, even though its resolution is a meagre 115,000 pixels.

Ultra-compact cameras are perfect for carrying with you at all times for impromptu snapping, but not if they're so slow that the moment has passed by the time they're ready to shoot. The SX-Z70 gets sensitive timing spot on, with just 1.3 seconds between pressing the power button and capturing a photo, and around 1.6 seconds between subsequent shots, which are amazing achievements for a budget camera. Casio has addressed the flash recycle issues of previous models, and the SX-Z70 takes just over two seconds between shots when using the flash.

Pretty much all the controls are accessed via the menu system, but at least it's quick to navigate. The left and right buttons can be assigned to one of a range of options when they're not navigating the menu, but you can't set them separately for access to two different options.

Fully pressing the shutter button without half-pressing first for focus captured an out-of-focus picture, but turning off the innocent-looking Quick Shutter option solved the problem. It's a bit odd this is on by default, though. Another menu option worth investigating is Anti Shake. This enables ISO speeds of up to 800 to combat blur from camera shake in low light, although

heavy noise means pictures aren't pretty at this setting. Without it, the camera sticks to ISO values from 50 to 200 unless you tell it otherwise with the manual ISO control. Noise is reasonably understated at these settings, but by no means eliminated.

Image quality suffered other problems, too. Focus was a little soft throughout our tests, and with hints of noise even when shooting in bright light and ineffective noise-reduction processing, pictures looked grubby. Exposures were generally well balanced, though, and colour reproduction managed a fine balance between vibrant, flattering tones and faithful accuracy. All-important skin tones were particularly well handled,

but the problems with detail and noise were never more evident than when attempting to capture subtle skin textures.

This camera would make a great present. It's well specified, looks beautiful and performs well, and its images are unlikely to disappoint the average casual user. However, Sony's W30 and FujiFilm's F20, while not quite as compact, offer vastly superior image quality for around £10 less.

Ben Pitt



SUMMARY

- ☒ Extremely compact
- ☒ Fast performance
- ☒ Disappointing images

DIGITAL CAMERA 7.1 megapixels (3,072x2,304), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), SD slot (8MB internal), li-ion battery
PART CODE EX-Z70SR
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.casio.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)

Battery life **316 shots** (see page 56)

-50% Reference +50% +100%

Also consider...

FUJIFILM FinePix F20 Zoom

★★★★★

£135 inc VAT



The F20 is a classy point-and-shoot camera that specialises in low-light photography. It produced excellent results at ISO 400, although shots were more varied at ISO 800 and above. Performance was up to scratch with just two seconds between shots. Image quality was excellent, making this camera brilliant value.



DIGITAL CAMERA 6.1 megapixels (2,848x2,136), 3x optical zoom (35-108mm), xD slot (10MB internal), li-ion battery
PART CODE N0077830A SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.fujifilm.co.uk ☒ Superb image quality ☒ Varying quality at high ISO settings FULL REVIEW Feb 2007

CANON EOS 400D

★★★★★

£480 inc VAT



The successor to the hugely popular EOS 350D, the EOS 400D is the best affordable digital SLR. Incredibly fast focusing, a high capture rate and brilliant image quality from the 10.1-megapixel sensor all make it really hard not to love this camera. For enthusiasts who want to upgrade from a film or compact camera, this is the model to get.



DIGITAL CAMERA 10.1 megapixels (3,888x2,592), 3x optical zoom (18-55mm), CompactFlash slot, li-ion battery PART CODE 12378009AA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.canon.co.uk ☒ Fantastic image quality ☒ Finite continuous mode FULL REVIEW Feb 2007

CANON PowerShot G7

★★★★★

£309 inc VAT

Canon's G-series high-specification compact digital cameras have been wooing photography enthusiasts since the start of the millennium. This latest instalment is the most affordable to date, is better looking than its predecessor and comes with high specifications, including a 6x zoom lens with optical image stabilisation.

It's lighter than previous models but, at 320g excluding its battery, still heavier than most compact cameras. The stocky metal body inspires confidence, though. Unfortunately, some features have regressed since the G6, with no fold-out hinge for the screen, no passive display for camera settings and no RAW capture mode. The fast f/2 aperture that separated previous G-series cameras from its competitors has been replaced by a bog-standard f/2.8 aperture.

Even so, the G7's unusual, and plentiful, features mean there still isn't much to which it can be compared. The new DIGIC III processor includes face-detection technology to assist the automatic exposure and focus. Watching the camera frame your subjects' heads in white boxes is fun, but the net benefit is less measurable. There's a hotshoe for an external flash unit and the threaded lens ring accepts 0.7x and 2x converters, available for around £90 each. There's even a neutral density (ND) filter for cutting down the amount of light hitting the CCD. It's

clearly not designed for the British climate, but could be useful if you want to accentuate motion blur.

The real highlight is how delightful it is to use. A mode dial covers the usual program, priority and manual modes, scene presets and video capture, plus two custom modes that store snapshots of camera settings. A second dial is dedicated to ISO speed, while a third sits around the circumference of the navigation pad, providing exceptionally efficient adjustment of shutter speed, aperture and manual focus. The 2½in high-resolution screen provides excellent visual feedback for manual exposure and focus, including a beautiful analogue-style revolving display of shutter speed and aperture. Performance is decent, capturing a 10-megapixel image every 1.5 seconds, although this falls to around 2.7 seconds when using the flash. However, the chunky li-ion battery lasted for only 284 shots in our test. It also took longer to recharge than it did to drain in constant use, so you might need two spares (at around £45 each) on photo shoots.

Image quality was among the best we've seen from a compact camera, but wasn't truly mould-breaking. Pictures were sharp, vibrant and well exposed but detail, and image quality in general, was on a par with Sony's 8-megapixel W100 (*What's New: Photography, Shopper* November 2006), currently available for around £200.



The G7's 10-megapixel rating is more of a hindrance than a help, giving soft images with a hint of noise even at ISO 80. However, it produced the cleanest, sharpest pictures at ISO 400 we have seen from a 10-megapixel non-SLR.

Rating the G7 is hard because there aren't many cameras like it. Panasonic's LX2 (which we are yet to review) challenges it in terms of quirky high-end features in a compact chassis, but it has only a 4x zoom. Demanding users on a budget should consider Canon's A710 IS, which provides a 6x zoom stabilised lens, a 7-megapixel sensor and full manual control for around £200. We'll review it as soon as possible.

The A710 IS won't appeal to the G7's obvious target audience: photography enthusiasts and professionals who want a classy compact camera for when they leave their SLR at home. Such people will love the classic styling and might not miss their SLR too much while adjusting the G7's manual controls. We expect fantastic image quality from a £300 compact, hence our image quality niggles. However, when we consider the whole package, the price does seem reasonable and the G7 is a good choice.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Packed with features
- ✓ Excellent manual control
- ✗ Image quality unremarkable for the price

DIGITAL CAMERA 10.0 megapixels (3,648x2,736), 6x optical zoom (35-210mm), SD slot (32MB card supplied), li-ion battery
PART CODE 1285B008AA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



SONY Cybershot DSC-W30

★★★★★

£127 inc VAT



Small and comfortable to hold, Sony's DSC-W30 also takes excellent photographs. Sony's noise reduction does an excellent job of minimising noise without losing too much detail captured by the 6-megapixel CCD. The only slight disappointment is the low-resolution 85,000-pixel screen.



DIGITAL CAMERA 6 megapixels (2,816x2,112), 3x optical zoom, Memory Stick Pro Duo slot (32MB internal), 3.6V 944mAh li-ion battery PART CODE DSCW30
SUPPLIER www.buyacamera.co.uk
DETAILS www.sony.co.uk ✓ Fantastic image quality
✗ Low-resolution screen FULL REVIEW Sep 2006

NIKON Coolpix L4

★★★★★

£73 inc VAT

One of the lowest-priced digital cameras, the Coolpix L4 is surprisingly good. The 4-megapixel sensor might seem a little low, but it's good enough for prints at 5x7in. Image quality is excellent, comparing well with that of cameras costing three times as much. If you're on a tight budget it's a good choice.



DIGITAL CAMERA 4.0 megapixels (2,272x1,704 pixels), 3x optical zoom, 10MB internal memory, SD slot, 2x AA batteries PART CODE VVA640E6
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk
✓ Excellent image quality; excellent value ✗ Slow, especially in low light FULL REVIEW Dec 2006

CASIO Exilim Zoom EX-Z850

★★★★★

£210 inc VAT

An 8-megapixel sensor, 2½in screen and a mind-boggling array of options and features make the Exilim Zoom EX-Z850 an attractive compact camera. It's quick to take pictures, and the battery life of 551 shots from a single charge is the best we've seen from a compact camera. Only aggressive noise reduction in indoor scenes prevented this camera getting top marks.



DIGITAL CAMERA 8 megapixels (3,264x2,448 pixels), 3x optical zoom, 8MB internal memory, SD slot, li-ion battery PART CODE 30041976 SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.casio.co.uk ✓ Packed with features ✗ Loss of detail at high ISO settings FULL REVIEW Jan 2007

PENTAX Optio W20

★★★★★
£167 inc VAT

The Optio W20 is the latest in Pentax's series of waterproof cameras, and can survive sustained submersion at depths of up to 1.5 metres. Sadly, it arrived for review out of sync with our beach holiday schedule. We underestimated how much fun it would be just to stick it under the bathroom tap, and the resulting video was a veritable sensory overload of colour and sound.

On a more practical level, the camera is perfectly happy in wet weather, and it's also dustproof. One downside of this resilience to the elements is that Pentax hasn't managed to incorporate a lens cover, so we'd recommend keeping a dry, lint-free cloth handy. The manual also helpfully points out that the W20 will sink in water, so using the supplied strap is a worthwhile precaution in open seas.

Otherwise, the W20 is a decent compact camera. Performance is tolerable at just under three seconds between shots. The screen's 115,000-pixel resolution is disappointing, but its 2½in diameter is just the thing when you're bobbing about with a snorkel and mask. The



controls and menu system are simplistic but perfectly adequate as long as you don't need regular access to custom settings. Image quality is generally excellent, with pleasing colours, reasonably low noise and considerably sharper detail than the other 7-megapixel cameras in our group test this month (see page 94). The ISO

control goes all the way up to 1,600 without completely trashing image quality, and the 1cm macro focus is a real treat.

The W20 is a decent though not particularly exciting camera. However, it's the only one we know of that's waterproof, and as such it presents considerable savings over buying a regular digital camera and a separate waterproof housing.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Waterproof
- ✓ Excellent image quality
- ✗ Mediocre performance

DIGITAL CAMERA 7.1 megapixels (3,072x2,304), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), SD slot (22MB internal), li-ion battery
PART CODE 19122
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.pentax.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



BENQ DC X720

★★
£170 inc VAT

BenQ claims that the X720 is the world's slimmest camera at 12.5mm deep. We measured 18mm from front to back at the thickest point, but this still makes it the slimmest camera we've ever seen. It looks uncannily like a Casio, especially as it's available in various colours. Ultra-compact cameras are never particularly comfortable to hold but the X720 is a little worse than most, as its rounded corner doesn't wedge into the palm of the hand.

You won't get many pictures from a single charge of the slim battery, partly because it doesn't last for long, but also because the camera is extremely slow to use. It takes five seconds to take a picture from startup and four seconds between subsequent shots. The 0.3fps continuous mode is the worst we have seen in years. The menu is slow to respond to button clicks and is badly laid out, with key options such as ISO speed about as inaccessible as they could be. Most frustrating is that the one-second autofocus time is followed by a further second of shutter lag, which makes it tricky to capture moving



subjects with any kind of precision. To top it off, the shutter sound is emitted from the speaker long after the picture is taken.

The X720 fared better when it came to image quality. Detail was soft compared to the best 6- and 7-megapixel cameras, but exposures were well balanced and the automatic settings handled tricky lighting well. Noise was visible at the lowest ISO setting, but not too intrusive at ISO 400, and its ISO 800 mode was passable for when gloomy lighting demanded it.

The X720 takes better pictures than the similar Casio SX-Z70 (see page 28) but its slow performance means it's not worth the extra expense.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Ultra-slim design
- ✓ Clean images at high ISO settings
- ✗ Slow performance

DIGITAL CAMERA 7.1 megapixels (3,072x2,304), 3x optical zoom (37.5-112.5mm), SD slot (18MB internal), li-ion battery
PART CODE 9J.02167.90G
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.benq.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



CHOOSING A... Compact Digital Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

RESOLUTION: 4 megapixels
ZOOM: 3x optical (35-105mm)
MONITORING: 1.8in, 85,000-pixel LCD screen
SUPPLIED MEMORY: 10MB internal
BATTERIES: 2x AA disposable
 Recommended minimum in grey

1 A digital camera with the specifications shown in grey will suit those who want to view pictures on their PC and create 7x5in prints. It should cost around £80, but there may be hidden downsides such as slow performance and very basic user controls.

2 Spend more and you'll get a higher resolution. An 8-megapixel sensor has the potential to produce sharp prints up to A4 size, but only if it and the lens are suitably high quality. There are 10-megapixel compact cameras available, but we've yet to see one significantly better than 8-megapixel models. Most people don't print enlargements so a 6-megapixel sensor is sufficient.

3 A 3x zoom lens gives reasonable scope for framing your shots, but a larger range can do wonders for your photographic skills. Some compact cameras manage a 6x zoom while a few go as far as 10x. However, big zooms need optical image stabilisation to avoid blur at extreme settings. Alternatively, consider a wide-angle lens, denoted by a 28mm or lower minimum focal length.

4 Big LCD screens are a treat to use but they don't always offer sharper detail. A 2½in screen is common even in the budget market, but only the best have resolutions of 200,000 or more pixels.

5 Consider hidden costs: budget £20 for a 1GB memory card, as the bundled memory will never be enough. If your chosen camera doesn't have rechargeable batteries, budget £15 to buy a set.

6 Don't forget that specifications tell you very little about image quality; you'll need to read our reviews for that. In a compact camera, we believe that the user shouldn't have to grapple with complicated controls to get great images in all lighting conditions.